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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OURISMAN'S INTRODUCTORY VISIT TO ST.
KITTS AND NEVIS

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11. (U) Summary: On November 14-15, 2006, Ambassador Ourisman visited St. Kitts and Nevis to present her credentials. She conducted an initial round of meetings with Kittitian and Nevisian officials, including the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, who identified trade and U.S. assistance as key priorities. Ambassador Ourisman also met with Peace Corps volunteers and Embassy wardens. End Summary.

St. Kitts

12. (U) On November 14, 2006, Ambassador Ourisman presented her credentials to Edmund Lawrence, the Deputy Governor General of St. Kitts and Nevis. (Note: The Embassy was told that Sir Cuthbert Sebastian, the Governor General, was traveling in the United States and has been ill. End Note.) After the brief ceremony, Ambassador Ourisman met with Theresa Nisbett, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Industry and Commerce. Nisbett praised the good relations between St. Kitts and the United States, and noted that her Ministry's working relations with the U.S. Embassy in Bridgetown were also excellent. She spoke of St. Kitts' post-sugar economic challenges, especially in reorienting the agricultural sector toward other products and markets. According to Nisbett, the government was considering various ideas, including developing organic and flower farming, but she noted wryly that "it won't be easy to persuade everyone here."

13. (U) Nisbett expressed concern about the delay in the World Trade Organization's (WTO) approval of the waiver for the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act (CBERA) trade preferences. According to Nisbett, during the October meeting of the Trade and Investment Council (TIC) in Washington, the Caribbean representatives were assured that the United States would "sort it out" with Paraguay to reach a consensus on the waiver. She added that the CBERA preferences were very important for St. Kitts, which was exporting to the United States products such as small electronic components.

14. (U) In a subsequent meeting with Timothy Harris, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Industry and Commerce, trade was again highlighted as a priority for St. Kitts. Harris welcomed the TIC discussions and expressed hope that the U.S. Congress will continue to support trade liberalization. Ambassador Ourisman assured Harris that the United States was committed to the TIC process and pointed to

President Bush's and Secretary Rice's strong record on trade.

Harris asked for additional U.S. assistance, especially in the areas of training and education. Because U.S. assistance has not been forthcoming as readily as in the past, according to Harris, "the Caribbean region has had to look elsewhere for help." He cited both Mexico (scholarships) and Taiwan (construction projects, agricultural projects, scholarships) as providing critically needed assistance.

15. (U) Ambassador Ourisman countered the notion that the United States was doing less by noting that under President Bush U.S. assistance to the region had doubled. Ambassador Ourisman also addressed Harris' concerns about the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative and its impact on St. Kitts and Nevis' tourism industry. She explained that the vast majority of Americans traveling to the Eastern Caribbean already do so with a passport and that the State Department is conducting a far-reaching public outreach effort to inform the American public of the new requirement.

16. (U) Ambassador Ourisman met briefly with Dr. Denzil Douglas, the Prime Minister, who was in the midst of budgetary negotiations in the parliament. While acknowledging "some difficult moments in our past," Prime Minister Douglas praised his country's current state of relations and cooperation with the United States. He noted that he made some very difficult decisions to move the country's economy from its unprofitable dependence on sugar, and he asked for continued U.S. assistance and investment to help him achieve this economic transformation.

Nevis

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17. (U) On November 15, Ambassador Ourisman traveled to Nevis and met with Deputy Governor General Eustace John. John's comments focused on the difficulties St. Kitts and Nevis citizens face in obtaining visas for travel to the United States. He spoke at length about the expense and time lost due to the need to travel to Barbados for visa interviews and urged the United States to reopen the Consulate General in neighboring Antigua.

18. (U) Ambassador Ourisman also met with Joseph Parry, the Premier of Nevis. Parry began by noting that he was elected only four months ago, after 14 years "in the wilderness," so his policy program was still being formulated. He stated that Nevis was expecting an economic boost from the 2007 Cricket World Cup (CWC). He was also planning to focus the island's agricultural production on produce, such as tomatoes and lettuce, which could be sold to the local hotels. Parry clearly views tourism as Nevis' future, and he told the Ambassador that he hopes to attract new hotel investment and development projects to the island. His social agenda rests on the goal of reducing crime by encouraging a more inclusive education system, sports, and building libraries.

19. (SBU) In her final meeting on Nevis, Ambassador Ourisman called on Malcolm Guichard, the Leader of the Opposition. Guichard spoke of Nevisians' increasing concerns about immigrant labor, especially from Jamaica, and stressed the need to protect Nevis' peace, tranquillity, and security, which are key assets for the island's tourism industry. Guichard, who had served as Minister of Tourism, was also worried about the island's ability to cope with the increased visitor arrivals during the CWC. Even though Nevis is not hosting any of the matches, Guichard told Ambassador Ourisman that Nevis is expecting some of the teams to stay on the island, including the Scottish team. According to Guichard, local hotel operators have refused to block out rooms for the expected CWC visitors, and some may therefore be turned away or forced to rent private homes or rooms.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Ambassador Ourisman's first visit to St. Kitts and Nevis was successful in reaffirming our ties with the two-island federation and exploring issues of concern to local government officials. Given the country's economic challenges, the government's focus on trade and assistance is understandable. In her meetings, Ambassador Ourisman heard about many possible solutions to the country's economic problems, but all of these seem to be at the idea stage, with little progress in planning and implementation. Development of alternative agriculture and additional tourist facilities seem to be the most viable long-term solutions, but they are unlikely to get much attention from the government, which will be seized in the coming months with CWC preparations.
OURISMAN